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ABSTRACT

Interviews with several individuals representing a variety of viewpoints about the recent controversy regarding textbooks and philosophy in the Kanawha County, West Virginia, public schools are presented in this transcript of a National Public Radio program broadcast in December 1974. Beginning with a discussion of the issue of textbook selection and content in Kanawha County, the interviews move into a brief but broad discussion of educational philosophy (humanism versus absolutism) of morality and the value systems of American children and American society, and of parent role and local input in schools. In addition to Kanawha County residents, school personnel, and a school board member, interviews are conducted with representatives of citizens groups based in California and Maryland, the president of the National Education Association, a staff member of the National Council of Teachers of English, and the superintendent of West Virginia schools. From these interviews it becomes clear that the controversy begun over textbooks envelops more than a few words or reading selections; it encompasses the foundations of American education and and questions who, indeed, should run our schools. (TO)

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"CENSORING TEXTBOOKS: IS WEST VIRGINIA THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?"

A TRANSCRIPT OF "OPTIONS ON EDUCATION"
DECEMBER 11, 1974

Key: A: Announcer Mike Waters
JM: Reporter John Merrow
P: Various parents
C: Various children
AH: the Reverend Avis Hill
EG: the Reverend Ezra Graley
CQ: the Reverend Charles Quigley
AM: Alice Moore, member, Kanawha County School Board
RD: Robert Dornan, representative of Citizens for
Decency through Law
JL: the Reverend James Lewis
NW: Mrs. Nell Wood, English Teacher, Charleston, W. VA
KU: Kanawha County School Superintendent Kenneth J. Underwood
DT: West Va State Superintendent Daniel Taylor
MK: Margaret Kuhn, Guardians of Traditional Education,
Prince George's County, Maryland
OM: Dr. Ona Lee McGraw, Citizens United for Responsible
Education, Montgomery County, Maryland
JH: James Harris, President, National Education Association
JMAX: John Maxwell, National Council of Teachers of English

A: From National Public Radio in Washington, I'm Mike Waters with "Options on Education".

(voices of two parents)

Those were West Virginians on opposite sides of a prolonged and often violent battle. While others, more complex issues have fueled the conflict, textbooks provided the spark. In fact, public school textbooks have been the subject of protests across the nation, not just in Kanawha County, West Virginia. Bedford County, Virginia; South St. Paul, Minnesota; Keyport, New Jersey; Montgomery County, Maryland; New Hanover, North Carolina; Prince George's County, Maryland; and Houston, Texas, to mention a few, have been the scene of organized protests against the educational materials used in public schools. This rash of protests may well be spontaneous, although some charge that they are financed and controlled from outside the communities themselves. Who is protesting what, and whether such protests are likely to continue, are the questions we're asking on this edition of "Options on Education". We're calling it, "Censoring Textbooks: Is West Virginia the Tip of the Iceberg?"

(MUSIC) "Teach Your Children"

Certainly the protest in Kanawha County, West Virginia, has received the most national attention. That protest has also been the most violent. Over the past three months Kanawha County, with 45,000 students, has been the scene of bombings, beatings, a walkout by local coal miners, and a boycott of the schools. At one point more than 10,000 students were kept out of school by their parents, who charge that the 325 textbooks recently chosen for English and language arts classes are obscene and anti-Christian. Most of the protestors are from the villages and towns in the mountains outside Charleston, the state capital, and several protest leaders are fundamentalist Christian ministers. You will meet them later in the program, and you will also hear from the defenders of these particular textbooks.

However, not everyone on this edition of "Options on Education" is from Kanawha County, and not everyone thinks that textbooks are really the issue. Some--from both sides--argue that what really is at stake is something far more important--like the future of public education, or the morals of American children.

Let's begin with the protesting parents, and their kids. Some of them were at a rally in Charleston, West Virginia on November 30, when they talked with John Merrow, of the Institute for Educational Leadership. (rally noises)

JM: Are your children in public school?

P: No, they are not. They're in a private Christian school.

JM: Will they go back to school if the textbooks are withdrawn?

P: Yes, they will.

JM: How about you?

P: Well, mine are not in school either. They went for four days since school started, and I just think it is a bunch of trash.

JM: Do you think parents ought to be the ones really to decide on what textbooks are used?

P: Yes, I believe so. Yes, they're our children, and we want what's best for our children.

JM: I see your sign says "we want prayer and Bible reading back in the school. Is that part of this protest?

P: Part of it, yes, sir.

JM: You not only want the textbooks withdrawn, but you'd like to see prayer and bible reading restored?

P: Well, I feel that the teachers ought to teach part of the Bible, and that these textbooks are strictly against the Bible cause I never did find that big word SOB written in the Bible. It is in the textbooks.

JM: Now some of the articles I've read in the national newspapers have said that you people down here are trying to turn your backs on the twentieth century.

P: What would you say the twentieth century is?

JM: What would you say? I'm suppose to ask the questions.

P: I would like to turn back to teaching God and Christ, and not have fairy tales and things like that, but when God comes up, teach what God is, who God is, who Christ is, and that He died for us.

JM: You don't think that the church and the state should be separate?

P: No, I think if we are all Christians, we are going to the same place. We are not going to be separated in heaven.

JM: Of course, a lot of Americans who are not Christians. What about them?

P: I haven't met but just one or two people that don't believe in God, but I do believe that the American people believes in God. If the textbooks get out of Kanawha County, out of West Virginia, and they try to teach Christ the way he is supposed to be taught, I think it will be back peaceable. But I don't think the Kanawha Valley is going to be peaceful until the books are out.

P: I proudly wear these buckskins as symbolical of my fathers who gave us this country and as a sign of the fathers who gave this country to us. I for one will do all that I can to leave my country safe for our children. This Scotch Tam that I wear, as you know, in this country the early settlers were primarily German first and then Scotch Irish, and they came to this country because of religious persecution.

JM: Well tell me now, why are you here at this particular protest rally?

- P: The reason why I'm here is because the same satanic forces that forced our fathers to emigrate to this country in the first place, the same satanic forces are seeking to destroy our freedom.
- JM: But you think the textbooks are a real threat to that heritage?
- P: That is because really you talk about multi ethnic culture and so forth, where has our heritage and our culture been taught? You can hear in schools about social studies and this and that and the other, but this satanic power that is trying to enslave our children is more fearful of Jesus Christ when he has a following of Scotch Irish and the German peoples, when they bow their knees to Jesus Christ, it makes the devil tremble.
- JM: Some where else I read that the kids are going to learn these words anyway, in the halls or in locker rooms. How do you feel about that?
- P: Well, they might do that, but you don't have to teach it to them.
- P: That's right, you don't have to drum it in their heads eight hours a day, and have one of those professional teachers drum and beat into their heads. Those are professionals. They know what they are doing.
- JM: What do you mean, are they doing this on purpose?
- P: Well, no, not exactly, but you take a five year old child and try to teach it, its ABC's at home and you see how long it takes a parent to teach it. But give it over to one of our professional teachers and watch how long it takes them to teach something to it. Watch how long it takes them to drum it into their head.
- JM: And you think kids should learn their ABC's and not their SOB's?
- P: That's exactly right. That's the way we want it.
- P: We've got good teachers, but that board of education is rotten.
- JM: Well, why are they trying to put these textbooks here in the first place?
- P: That's what we would like to know. We would like to know what is really behind this. Besides communism.
- JM: Communism? Explain what you mean.
- P: You should know what I mean (laughter).
- JM: You think superintendent Underwood ought to leave this position in Kanawha County?
- P: I sure do.
- JM: How?
- P: Well, we would like to ride him out on a rail.
- JM: Are you sending your children to private school?
- P: Right.
- JM: How much does it cost you?
- P: Forty-five dollars a month for three of them.
- JM: For three children?
- P: For three children.
- JM: What impact does that have on your own family budget?
- P: Well, we are going to have to, today I'm giving up the newspaper. We will take it Sunday only. We've been considering giving up the telephone. I will have meat only on Sunday. I have already given up soft drinks, and well, we've given money, you know, to fight against these textbooks, given to various things to help fight it. Christmas will be rather slim at home this year, but I imagine that some day the children will thank us for it.

- P: We all feel, and I think the children feel about the same way, no education at all this year would be better than be educated out of these books.
- C: They talk about a better education for kids and like you have got to put your kids back in school, but if we went to school now with the books in, it wouldn't be an education. It would just be trash, because that's all there is in the schools now.
- C: I've been going all year now. It is mainly because we could figure out that the school was getting pretty bad anyway, because we'd have "class day" at school and everybody would get high on drugs and stuff. My parents and myself, neither one, didn't want me in this kind of atmosphere, and so they just figured we better be putting me in Christian school than have me messed up in this stuff. A Christian can't go in the lord and be put down by the devil at the same time, it just won't work. I've only been saved for about 4 1/2 to 5 months and since then a lot of my so-called friends aren't my friends anymore, because they don't like the way I believe. They go to public school and they make fun of me, because I'm trying to be different.
- JM: What's in the textbooks?
- C: A bunch of cursing and stuff.
- JM: Haven't you heard the curse words anyway?
- C: Yes, I've heard them, but they are trying to teach them to these little kids.
- JM: Do you think that if the books are withdrawn you guys will go back to public school?
- C: Yes, Probably.
- JM: But you are here today, you are marching?
- C: Yes.
- JM: You seem kind of young to be carrying signs. What are you carrying signs about?
- C: About the textbooks. (rally sound bed)
- A: Those were parent and kids at a protest rally in Chareston, West Virginia on November 30. The rally attracted about 2,000 protestors, including Representatives of the John Birch Society and the National Front for Moral Regeneration. Among the speakers was the Reverend Carl McIntire, a well known leader of anti-Communist causes. While you will hear him in the background, our attention is focused on the local leaders in Kanawha County, especially three fundamentalist ministers, Avis Hill, Ezra Graley, and Charles Quigley. These three men have helped establish private Christian schools in the county today, they have an enrollment of less than 1,000, as far as we could determine. As a fundamentalist minister, Avis Hill sees the battle over textbooks as a nationwide religious struggle. John Merrow wanted to find out who favors the textbooks.
- AH: The educators are the ones who support the books. NEA is the great leader of the education movement of the teachers. They are the powerful institution. They have a lobby in Washington, D.C., almost like the oil companies do, and they have the power to dictate really, them and the publishers, what's going into the books without the parents having the opportunity to know. We the parents are beginning to open our eyes and realize now that the educators in the system are trying to tear our system down across this nation, so we are opening our eyes and we are standing in objection to the things that are in the books.
- JM: What do those textbooks in your view, threaten to do to your children?
- AH: Demoralize, demoralize completely I mean to teach that it's fine to deceive, to lie, to cheat, to steal, even to kill, and to believe that there is no God. I mean you have your right and everyone else has a right to believe whether there is a God or whether there isn't, and I went along, I accepted it when the Bible was taken out of the school, but I can't accept the fact that the Bible be brought back into the schools and taught right along beside a myth. I can't believe that. It's been taught long enough as evolutionist theory, but I can't go along with them bringing it back into the school system and teaching it right beside a myth. I can't do that.

- A: In addition to the concerns about morality expressed by Avis Hill, The Reverend Ezra Graley challenges the educational value of the textbooks.
- EG: We feel that there is no educational value at all to the books. We've read some of them, and it just takes you around in circles, and after you read them you don't know any more than did before you started. Also they have told in several papers, Washington Post and different ones, that we are against books period, but we are not against books. We are against these filthy books.
- A: A third leader of the protest is the Reverend Charles Quigley, who feels that it's not an academic argument.
- CQ: I think it's your very life hinging upon what happens to these textbooks, because if we can make the Board of Education listen to us, then our government had better stand up and listen to the very fact that when we say that we don't want something, then we don't want it. Now if the Board of Education comes over and tries to close us down, or tries to put pressure on us, then I'll fight. They can't have my daughter, they can't have my daughter. I have one daughter, and I'll fight them until my death. She's going to school where I want her to go to school, she's going to do what I tell her to do, not what some Board of Education or some government tells her to do. That's my right, that's our responsibility. You raise corn, you train children.
- A: For Avis Hill and the other ministers, private Christian schools, and supplementary instruction at home for those who cannot afford the private Christian schools, are only temporary solutions.
- AM: Get your basic textbooks, your reader, and your arithmetic and your spelling book and instruct your child at home until this fear is over. The only way I can see this fear ending in Kanawha County is for those books to be taken out of the schools and go back to what it was last year. As far as I am concerned, I think we ought to go back to the old McGuffey reader.
- A: Mrs. Alice Moore is the only member of the 5-person school board who has consistently supported the protest. Unlike the three Fundamentalists ministers, Mrs. Moore sees the situation in political terms.
- AM: I think in our case, because we have had not only nationwide attention but worldwide attention, that it is almost essential that we not win, because if we did win the parents all over this nation really would feel that they could take over schools again and really have an influence on schools, I think we are going to win eventually, but I really think that for the sake of the establishment, the educational establishment, it is just essential that we couldn't win here.
- JM: The victory would be a symbol to the rest of the nation?
- AM: Absolutely. We have a policy now that says that no child has to study any book to which his parents object, so in effect if our parents wanted to, they could get together and everyone could agree to object to every other book used by every other child. We can put all kinds of pressure on the school system. We can make it extremely tough. They think they have won a victory, well, we can make it extremely uncomfortable in their victory. There are many things we can do even if we leave the children in school. We can let them know, we can send letters and let them know that they are not to ask our children any personal questions and they're not to interfere in any way in the parent-child relationship. They're not to use any textbooks that contain any kind of offensive language, and if they're not sure whether the language is offensive, they can call us up and ask us. I'm just suggesting to parents that if you have to leave your children in there are many things you can do. You're not just trapped. For weeks and weeks we had literally 10,000 children out of school. We even had up to 15 or 16,000 out at one time. Most of those children are back in school now but in the upper Kanawha Valley area, around Cabin Creek, those books aren't going to be used up there, that's for sure. There're very strong, I tell you I admire those people up in that end of the country. You know, of course, they have decided that since they are not going to be able to control their schools, they're just going to take the country with them. They'll

take the whole thing.

A: Not all the protestors are local. Robert Dornan lives in California, where he is a national spokesman for Citizens for Decency through Law, an organization based in California. For Dornan, the issue is the school's role in the teaching of values. Dornan came to Kanawha County after the protest erupted and then spent several months assisting the protest leaders. He is no longer in Kanawha County.

RD: If you tried to structure your object to the whole series of books, there is one side-bar problem that has nothing to do with the books directly, and that is media coverage of the whole incident here. From the three television networks to the local newspaper coverage to the local television coverage, there has never been an attempt really to show the upper middle class and the general middle class objection to these books. I feel after going for two or three months this way, it's a deliberate attempt to give a class warfare complexion to the whole issue. That it is quote "the fundamentalist under-educated creeker people", the ones that I like to refer to as mountaineers, versus some how or other "the sophisticated flat landers who work in the chemical industry". That's phony and false, so you have had this media problem exaggerating the frustration.

A: John Merrow did not find evidence of a class struggle in Kanawha County, and you will hear from anti-textbook people who are clearly not mountaineers, including Dornan himself.

RD: OK now to come back to the problem directly. There is an over all, over laying problem here that I describe as "parent power". It's nationwide, I assume probably culture wide in all of western civilization, that teachers, although they may be professionals, have no right to say that parents should get lost. Parents aren't just animals that supply their offspring, their young, to be educated by teachers having total control-particularly when they dip into value systems. Parents have the primary obligation for the spiritual upbringing of their children, and they also have the primary obligation for making sure they get an education, period. Teachers must realize that parents are their employers, so that "parent-power" problem affects the whole range of specific issues.

Now, after approaching the basic education failure problem, we say "if you're failing to teach them properly, where do you get all the time for this cute experimentation by putting in the books (whether it's supplementary reading books or primary text) criminals, thugs, rapers, wierdos, radicals? What material do you kick out to put this in? Does Dickens go out the window, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Shakespeare? There are only so many hours in the classroom, and something has to be taken out to put in this quote "reality," and they even preface some of these stories with those very words, "a realistic story." It's in I think a fourth grade book; it's called "A New Street Game," and it tells how when an oriental American woman moves into the ghetto and puts in flower boxes, the little Black kids tear it up, destroy it, and the closing line in the story is, "that dumb lady should have known better than to try and fix up this crummy neighborhood." No value judgement is given after that, and then the other side of this double issue (one being, what do you take out to put in?) is these aren't ethics classes where these are shown as gross examples of anti-social conduct. They're just thrown at them without any explanation at all. Now I can see that some of it should be discussed in current events classes, possibly as some aspect of social studies, but why is this necessary in grammar books? Are questions in arithmetic also going to involve this junk material now? I mean we are battling over English books; wait till next spring when the social studies books come, then you're really going to see a revolution.

There are observable evils in mankind that must be condemned and, no, the school system is not in a Judeao-Christian culture some neutral body that throws a lot of garbage some good and some bad out to the kids and says "lots of luck, kids, pick your value system."

A: Most opponents of the textbooks focus on their contents. They feel that the six elementary texts are sacreligious and anti-Christian, and they say that many of the 319 secondary school English books are obscene. On the other side, the Reverend James Lewis, an Episcopalian minister who favors the books, believes that the protestors are reacting to more than alleged blasphemy and obscenity.

JM: Is there something in here about challenging, about questioning, that people have a problem with?

JL: Yes, for example, the textbook might ask a child how he feels about a particular sight or emotion, or for example, instead of asking a child to write a story cold, to create a story, it may ask a child to get in touch with it's own feelings and be able to put those feelings on paper. Because that's where literature comes from, from the inside of people. It's that kind of approach. Now the opposition has said that it is an invasion of privacy--well, all literature is an invasion of privacy. That's something that they haven't come to grips with. Some of them are obviously worried about some of the words that are used and to the whole perspective of education being in realistic setting. These books are designed, many of them that there has been opposition to, are designed to appeal to a child who is not particularly turned on by books, not into the world of literature and reading, and these books are designed to hook a child at that point and grab him and help him understand that there's something real in those books for him.

There is a tradition, a fundamental tradition in our nation (fundamentalists they are called), and I think this mind set says there's one way salvation, there's one way to education, there's one way to morality. They are having a hard time dealing with a pluralistic society. Many of us have wondered where there support was coming from and how closely they were aligned to causes way over on the right, and I think it is fairly clear from that rally here this past weekend when they brought in Carl McIntire and one of their leaders from the John Birch Society and they came in and started talking about Blacks and about Jews, and about the National Council of Churches. It's a party line almost that many of us have heard before. It's raising its head. To hook on to Carl McIntire is, for example, not going to be helpful for them. I think it is tactical error. I think the whole system of public education is under seige in our country right now, from what I see in Kanawha County particularly. Whether we can continue to live together and be educated in the same school system is up for grabs right now.

A: That was the Reverend James Lewis, an Episcopalian Minister who favors the textbooks. The 325 textbooks were chosen by a committee of five English teachers--as required by State law--and by subcommittees made up of 20 more English teachers. In all, the Kanawha County school board spent approximately \$425,000 on the controversial textbooks. Mrs. Nell Wood, who teaches English at George Washington High School in Charleston, headed the selection committee that chose the books. She spoke with John Merrow.

JM: Do you regret in anyway the selection of the textbooks?

NW: Not at all. I think if I had it to do all over again I would make exactly the same choices given the same instructions in the beginning. I'm not sure there is any way this could have been avoided at this particular time.

JM: What books did you choose that the protestors are specifically objecting to?

NW: It's a little bit difficult to say who's objecting to what. That's a question you might ask from the protestors, because the area of protest varies, and it is not consistent from series or from even article to article. We have has some objections on a series which is a literature series that is basic; it is in it's fifth edition

and it's been around since 1952. I'm not quite sure how I can explain that one. We also have some objection to contemporary material. Now, much of the objection came at a level of material that was for advanced senior high school students working on college level, but then there were objections to elementary material even to first grade material.

JM: You brought 325 volumes. How many sets did you buy?

NW: Now, it is a bit difficult to say how we bought, because we didn't buy. The committee only made selections, made recommendations for using a particular series and then each school within its particular program made selections from that list to suit its program. Nobody buys all of the books. There wouldn't be that much money, but each school, each English department made the selections that would work best for them.

JM: Do you regret the process by which the books were selected in any way? Would you for example want to include parents in the selection process?

NW: The process I don't regret, because I think the process was a democratic one. I'm not sure that I would want to include parents in a voting capacity because I don't think they have the background information. Unless it was someone who keeps up with a particular field in a very intense way, I'm not sure that person could be qualified. Now I recognize that parents are interested in books, but we have a great deal of parental input in schools in Kanawha County. It's not a cold calculating school system that doesn't see parents or listen to parents.

JM: Do you think that parents who feel strongly that the curriculum materials are inappropriate have a right to insist that their children not be exposed to those materials?

NW: That has always been a policy in Kanawha County Schools. That's what makes this whole protest so incomprehensible. Parents in Kanawha County have always had the right to read their children's materials and ask that a child be removed from any or all the particular set of materials, but that is not what we have at this point.

It is far more important than the books. I think the books have ceased to be important here since, oh, last summer. I think the issue is one of the control of the schools. It's a issue of total mistrust of school system, of teachers, almost a desire to go back to the days before there was scientific knowledge. There's a great deal of mistrust of the scientific method. There is a great deal of mistrust of any inquiry in a classroom, a great deal of fear of students talking about what they think and feel. We've been told we are not suppose to ask students what they think. We're supposed to tell them what to think. There is a basic disagreement as to what education is all about. There is on the one side of feeling that education is supposed to be indoctrination in a party line, and then there is on the part of the teachers the feeling that education trains students to think; it gives them tools to deal with their world.

JM: Do you have in any way the feelings that the people themselves are being lead further down the road by their leaders, by the ministers?

NW: That seems entirely possible. I know for example that many incorrect statement have been made about the books. I know that many incorrect flyers have been issued about the books. I know that material that has not been a part of the selection process has been xeroxed and distributed. For example, once on Capitol Street, I saw two different copies of a sexual book that has nothing to do with the material. There is a flyer that's being put out to buy one of the agencies with a plea for help that contains sexual diagrams. I mean it's a rather weird thing. People's fears are being played upon. I would not want such material being taught in the schools, but I know that material is not in fact a part of the selection, and I question really the methods of people who use materials of this sort.

- A: Mrs. Wood's accusations about misinformation were confirmed by John Merrow, who brought back several leaflets from the November 30th rally that contained sexually explicit material that is not in the controversial textbooks. Mistrust has gone hand in hand with misinformation, and the person the protestors probably trust least is the superintendent of schools, Kenneth J. Underwood. John Merrow asked Dr. Underwood what role he played in the textbook selection.
- KU: Actually none. My role as superintendent is to accept the recommendation of the five teachers who make up the committee and then pass that right on to the board.
- JM: So that when the protestors want to ride you out of town on a rail for choosing the textbooks, they're making a major error there, you really didn't play any role at all?
- KU: Well, I passed it on to the board, and as you know being a superintendent that's where it all stops, so that when they want to ride me out on a rail, that is expected as superintendent.
- JM: Is it over, or is it nearly over?
- KU: No, I think this a long way from being over, a long long way.
- JM: What about the textbooks themselves. What is in them some people find so objectionable?
- KU: I think-may I go deeper then just the question itself? If we were to take literally what some of the protestors are saying, specifically those being lead by the four or five ministers, we would throw out every one of these 325 books which in my estimation would completely sterilize public education and think again I think we have to understand what public education is. Public is for all; it isn't for a few; it isn't for one specific segment of the society here in Kanawha County; it's for all children. The you take a look at Kanawha County. I'm relatively new to West Virginia. I have been here 3 and a half years now. I have never seen a state or a community anywhere where I have ever lived where they are more distrusting of public officials and by public officials I'm talking again about the school board, administrators, teachers and all. I think there is a reason for this, and if you go back into West Virginia's history it is easy to see. West Virginia is a state in my estimation (I'll have to use a four letter word but I think it is descriptive) I think West Virginia and its people have been raped, and they've been raped by people from outside of the state, of their natural resources which is really their thing. Most of this has gone out of state and not stayed in state. They had public officials in the last decade, a governor who is still in federal prison, they have been taken by public officials apparently time and time again, so I can't blame them for this.
- JM: Have you heard from many superintendents elsewhere in the country?
- KU: Oh, all over. Superintendents from around the country in the beginning called and laughed, just as I would have, (It is an in-house joke) "what are you doing down there, Ken?" Well, after the first month they quit laughing, they understood that this was extremely serious, I think the calls and letters and everything I'm receiving now and have been for the last two months have been, "Ken, tell us what happened." Because I think they realize that this covers more then just Kanawha County. This whole thing could go into their school system as well as this one here.
- A: Dr. Underwood thinks that the battle about textbooks in West Virginia is far from over, but in fact school attendance is nearly normal today. While the 319 secondary school English textbooks are in normal use in classrooms, the six elementary school language arts books are now kept in the school library, and kids cannot use them without parental permission. The books may not be used in the classroom. The West Virginia State Superintendent, Dr. Daniel Taylor, believes that the decision to remove the elementary textbooks from the classroom represented a victory for the protestors. John Merrow wanted to know about national implications of the protestors' apparent

victory.

JM: Do you think that if word gets out now around the country that in fact this amounts to a victory for the anti-textbook people that this would lead to more protest of this kind around the country?

DT: Oh I don't know. That is awfully difficult for me to hypothesize about. I could ask you that question, I suppose, easier then you could ask me. What I think will really happen is that the textbook publishers will view this circumstance and sporadic concerns around the country and from an economic motivation simply begin to tone down some of the kinds of things that were being included in textbooks under the name of "relevance" for example, rather than anti-textbook people exercising censorship by bring pressures to bear on boards of education, in board rooms of publishing concerns they will look around and decide that they had better publish a slightly different kind of material then they thought was going to sell in late 1960's and early 1970's. Any censorship that will be imposed will be imposed by textbook publishers themselves, not wanting to lose Texas, for example, or Georgia, or, heaven forbid, California because if they lose Texas and California for example in their textbook adoptions they're economically in considerable difficulty, so I think that's the kind of circumstance that will result rather than any concerted effort in local boards of education removing certain kind of material.

JM: Do you think the issue is dying here in Kanawha County?

DT: No, I would have just about been ready to pronounce it until the latest rally, and I don't know how much enthusiasum that's going to continue to engender. I think that if we're left alone (I don't mean that to you personally) but I think if we are left alone here over the next six or eight months, that this particular problem will have pretty much been taken care of.

JM: Well, you are not going to be left alone. The National Education Association (the NEA) and National Council of Churches are coming in to hold hearing:.

DT: I have talked with the NEA people. I have not talked with National Council of Churches, and I think the timing is terrible. I don't think the timing could be any worse on the part of the NEA, and I've expressed that directly to them. I think it is tremendous that at some point all the factors be looked at and reexamine and decisions made whether it relates to establishing legislative initiative or whether it has to do with academic freedom or the rights of teachers, but I think to begin to do that this week or next is irresponsible on the part of NEA, and I have so expressed that to them.

A: As state superintendent Daniel Taylor mentioned, the recent rally may have revived the protest. It did attract people from approximately 15 states.

JM: Where have you come from for the rally?

P: Columbus, Ohio

JM: Is that right. How many people came down from Ohio?

P: There are other people who are interested but they didn't come with us. There are three with us. For many years I have been following this sort of thing, and I realize the kind of things that are in them, and the parents have been unable to do away with them. This is one of the few places where the parents have banded together to do something about this, and I think it is extremely important. You see, it is a matter of parents rights.

JM: Where has the same problem existed in Ohio also?

P: It exists nationwide. I was alerted to it because it was in other states beyond Ohio, and then I look at my own state and I find the same thing going on there.

P: In Buffalo where I live, even when I was in school ten years ago, I noticed a lot of the same things and some good friends of mine brought some of their books home from school, like Catcher in the Rye and others just like that, and personally I sure don't feel that they belong in a public school. Personally I will get a big thrill out this Rally to see if there is this many good people still left around here and also just to get more publicity.

JM: Why are you here today?

P: To help the West Virginia parents protest this. If it doesn't stop here, then we've got to fight it somewhere else.

P: I think that we have to go all the way to the top. I think this is where we come in with our Congressmen and Senators and we don't want them to change our children and we questioned what are they changing our children into?

(MUSIC) "Country Road"

A: But parental concern about textbooks is not limited to West Virginia. Neither is the meeting of groups to express that concern. Mrs. Margaret Kuhn is an official of the Guardians of Traditional Education in Prince George's County, Maryland. John Merrow asked her about that organization.

MK: The Guardians is a parent group formed in Prince George's County two and a half years ago as a result of the forced busing in Prince George's County. We learned after the children were bussed of these programs in the schools, and we started digging and we found most of them coming out of HEW, NEA, the Office of Education and this type of thing, so this is where we've spent most of our time researching. We've known about the dirty textbooks for almost three years now, but we feel that this is more than just a textbook issue. The issue is humanism, it's a philosophy and this filters down through the textbooks. Textbooks are just a symptom of the real issue.

JM: So the issue is humanism. Are you pro humanism or against humanism?

MK: We are opposed to humanism.

JM: Explain what that is?

MK: Well, humanism is I think where basically man believes in man, that he is the supreme being, they do not believe in absolutes. We as Christian parents, at least in my group and I think the movement throughout the United States, we do believe in absolutes, we do believe that schools should not be teaching these things but it should be inculcated within the curriculum to where these kids automatically know that wrong is wrong and right is right. Throughout this humanistic philosophy it's a situation ethics type thing; you do whatever you want to do whenever you feel like it.

JM: How many parents or how many people belong to Guardians of Traditional Education?

MK: Well, we have no exact number but I would not be afraid to say that we are in the thousands. I'll say it like that. It isn't just the state or in Prince George's County but now we are also an affiliate group of Coalition of Children, which is a national movement, and we have representatives in 50 states. There are thousands of parents in every state that feel the same way Reverend Hill feels, but we have known for some time. This isn't just something sudden. The people like myself and others that have worked in this thing, some for twenty years.

JM: Would private schools be an answer?

MK: I think that this is really the only choice for parents that feel so strongly about this. I think what we are actually saying and we are screaming is, "we want our academic freedom too."

A: Trouble is brewing in neighboring Montgomery County, Maryland. Dr. Una Lee McGraw is one of two hundred members of Citizens United for Responsible Education in Montgomery County, and, like Mrs. Kuhn, Dr. McGraw believes that the textbooks are not the real issue.

OM: It's a question of values that are in the textbooks. It's a question of the values and the philosophy that's in teacher training methods and in the philosophy of the National Education Association and some of your establishment educationist groups who don't necessarily reflect the attitudes and opinions of teachers generally.

JM: So I hear you saying it's two questions then: it's one of values and it's also the ultimate question of "who controls the public schools?"

OM: That's right.

JM: Let's talk about the values then. You apparently object to the values that you feel are being taught in the public schools today, at least in Montgomery County?

OM: Yes, and we have found that this is a nationwide problem. Actually it relates to the general direction of American public education itself; even since the 1930's it's been falling into this concept of life adjustment with a de-emphasis on basic academic skills. It has shifted away from the development of the intellect as the primary purpose of education into life adjustment, personality development, this kind of activity, and this is what we object to. We are saying that we basically feel most parents send their children to school to get a basic academic education, and most parents feel that they can do the job at home of developing their children's character and personality.

JM: Are you saying there is too much emphasis on how the student feels, what the students thinks, rather than on reading, writing, thinking?

OM: This is exactly the problem. They are going completely into the area of how the child reacts to the material.

JM: What's wrong with that?

OM: Well I think it's number one, it's a violation of privacy and number two...

JM: No one else is supposed to know how a child feels?

OM: Well, the problem is that the material is becoming intensely personal. Instead of talking about something is objective or outside of the child that we can discuss in a classroom discussion, the material is intensely personal. The difference is that in basic education the children would read the stories and then discuss them, but they would not be forced to discuss how they personally feel in terms of life, and love and all these gut issues...

JM: And you think it's some way dangerous to discuss gut issues like that in the classroom?

OM: I think that it tends to make these kinds of issues a matter of opinion, merely a matter of sociological background.

JM: That's the notion of situation ethics?

OM: This is situation ethics. We are saying if there are parents who don't share our values and they want their children to have situation ethics and rap sessions about how they feel, that's fine; let them have it.

- JM: How can they have it now, if we have truths conflicting? If your truth conflicts with my truth and that conflicts with Nancy's truth, what do we do?
- OM: For me and I think for growing numbers of parents the only solution is alternative schools.
- JM: Within the public school system?
- OM: I think we have to work for choice. Parents have to work for parental rights and parental freedom of choice in a broad range of alternatives.
- JM: Do you here in Montgomery County feel a kinship with the protestors down in Kanawha County, West Virginia?
- OM: Yes, very much, because we feel that they are raising an issue there that goes beyond simply objecting to certain passages in books or certain kinds of stories. The issue is much more profound than that, and it relates to what are the ultimate rights of parents. Do parents have indeed any rights at all?
- JM: Almost every parent I talked to down there said, "if the textbooks are withdrawn, I'll send my kids back to school." Now, that's not what you are saying.
- OM: Well, I was down there I guess it was about three weeks ago, and I talked to quite a few of the people. They know what humanism is; they talked about this; they talked about situation ethics, and I know that many of them are very concerned about the profounder aspects, but I think that the NEA response to the people of West Virginia is an indication of how serious they know it is.
- A: Dr. McGraw is not the first person thus far to attack the National Education Association, which is the largest teacher organization with 1.6 million members. Recently James Harris, President of the NEA, said that the West Virginia protest was a "well financed, well organized resurgence of extremist activity," and the NEA has sent a team of investigators to Kanawha County. He restates his concern.
- JM: Yes, there are reasons to believe that it is just that, that it is a well-financed effort, that many individuals who are present there, there is evidence to believe that they are part of other kinds of similar actions in other places, and that is not just a spontaneous "hit and miss" operation.
- JM: Who are some of the individuals or organizations?
- JM: I actually don't have the names, but I have been briefed and we have staff people that have been there and have indicated to me that this is true, but I don't actually have the names on hand.
- JM: When I mentioned that to the people themselves they scoffed that and said the NEA is trying to tar this movement with that brush of the John Birch Society, for example.
- JM: Well, I'm certain that there would be efforts to try to rid themselves of any kind organized effort behind it, but nevertheless we have fairly substantial information to suggest that the allegations that we have made are in fact true. As far as it being a nationally established organization that is programmed from some national office, it's not that kind of thing that we are saying.
- JM: But I want to make sure that I don't misunderstand your position. You are saying that there may be some parents who feel that way, but by and large the flurry is a result of people who make a habit of this kind of criticism of the schools, and in that sense it represents a well financed right wing conspiracy?

- JH: That's the point.
- JM: What if forty percent, say (just to pick a round figure), of the parents felt they wanted schools that in fact indoctrinated their children and did not tell them about other ways of living?
- JH: Well, I think that would be unfortunate because it is not the role of the public school system to indoctrinate students into a way of living. A public school system has the obligation of teaching, of broadening students, producing mature students that are capable of dealing with various kinds of situations that they are going to confront in life.
- JM: On the notion of the indoctrination of schools that in fact teach, almost preach, a specific and traditional value system and so not teach about other forms of living, you're saying that is not the role of public schools?
- JH: That is not the role of public school.
- JM: So if parents want that kind of education for their kids then I infer what they have to do is pay a second time to a private school of some sort?
- JH: Well I think there are a number of areas where parents want their children indoctrinated or preached to, and some of them get this in a church school setting that supplements their public school experience, some get in a parochial school setting that replaces the public school setting, some provide some kind of summer camp experience or retreat experience where they get this special education that they want their kids to have, so there are ways for parents to get that part indoctrinated into their kids that they want them to have.
- A: Is the protest in West Virginia a well-financed resurgence of right wing activity, as NEA president James Harris charges? Perhaps the NEA's own investigation will resolve the question. However, the more dramatic aspect of conspiracy should not be allowed to cloud the more important debate about the aims of education. Many protestors maintain that public education today is undermining traditional values. The defenders, like the NEA's Harris and John Maxwell of the 50,000-member National Council of teachers of English, believe that the issues are the separation of church and state, tolerance for diverse value systems, and censorship. John Maxwell talked by telephone with John Merrow.
- JMax: We are opposed to the local minorities, persons with a rather extremely minor point of view on lets say morality, taste or aesthetics dominating the selection process. That too often happens in what we call instances of censorship. It is not a case of broad segment of the community at all but a very small part of the community with a special axe to grind, a case to make, a concern to put forth.
- JM: You also and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds to me as if you are taking a position that it's important for students to be exposed to, or to consider different, value systems along the way to getting an education.
- JMax: Yes, all of us have value systems, we inherit them for the most part, and the ones we inherit are the deepest and most abiding ones, and that's why when I talk to parents I say you need not be afraid because what you have said to that child through the years and what you have exemplified to them, those are the values they're going to live by for the most part. Now they run into some different value systems some place in their experience, either now or later, and they're going to have to wrestle with alternative value systems, with things that they don't understand, and the chances are very, very high they're going to reject those systems, but they have to examine them, because when they are on their own they will not be prepared to meet with chicanery and fraud and so forth that may be actually part of those alternative value systems. Literature forms an arena,

a possibility, a means by which youngsters can examine those systems without getting burned. The primary value of literature is to think about himself, make his decision eventually and examine the things these authors have set forth.

- A: The differences between the protestors and the defenders, whether in West Virginia, Maryland, or anywhere else in the United States, are fundamental, and perhaps irreconcilable. Protestors believe that public schools ought to teach one single true value system. The Pro-Textbook forces believe that public school must teach about many different value systems in order to prepare children for life in a complex, pluralistic society.

A way out of the impasse might be publically financed alternative schools. Some community are experimenting along those lines.

We began by asking whether textbook protests will continue? We think they will. But another large, violent outbreak like that in Kanawha seems unlikely. A unique set of circumstances there--most notably the walk-out by coal-miners-propelled Kanawha County into the headlines. However, national discontent about the public schools is as strong as it has every been: discipline problems, disrespect for authority, poor academic performance, rising costs, vandalism, busing. These are the common complaints heard from different segments of the public. Because textbooks are an easy, highly visible issue to build around, school books are likely to be cited as a major issue in subsequent protests. Onlookers would do well to probe for larger issues behind the books.

There will be much more at stake.

Protests about textbooks will never be as black and white as printed words on a page.

(MUSIC) "For-What It's Worth"

If you would like a transcript of this program, send fifty cents to "Options on Education," Room 310, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. The zip is 20036

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